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Northern Luzon Mission

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The Northern Luzon Mission was organized in 1919 and reorganized in 2017. It is part of the North Philippine Union Conference of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. The Northern Luzon Mission is situated at the northwest section of the island of Luzon, Philippines. It covers the provinces of Ilocos Norte, La Union, Pangasinan, and some municipalities of the provinces of Ilocos Sur, Abra, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija. It has a land area of over 13,000 square kilometers and a population of almost 7 million (2018 census). The mission has 169 organized churches and a total membership of 29,601 as of June 2018.¹ It has two academies, five elementary schools, 39 multi-grade schools, and a senior college with a graduate school program.

Origin of Seventh-day Adventist Work

The work of the Northern Luzon Mission started through the pioneering labor of Roy E. Hay and his wife, Edith. The American couple and their young children arrived at Port Pandan, Vigan, Ilocos Sur, on a ship from Manila on November 27, 1913. The city of Vigan, being the "chief commercial center of the northern provinces,"² was chosen to be the center for SDA work despite being considered the center of Roman Catholicism north of Manila.

Hay met with two American missionaries who had come to the Philippines earlier, and he learned from their experiences. Thus, he decided to begin the Adventist work in Northern Luzon by learning the local language of the people, translating literatures to the local language, and training local people to bear part of the SDA work. A few days after their arrival, Hay and his wife, Edith, met Juan O. Afenir, who would be the key person to help fulfill his three strategies. Afenir, a teacher in a Jesuit seminary at Vigan, became the Ilocano language tutor, the initial translator of Adventist literatures, and the first local person trained for the SDA work.

The year 1914 is considered the year when the foundation of the work was laid firm. It was when Hay started to learn the local language and was able to translate certain literatures. Also, in this year, the Hays opened their home to student boarders as was the practice of some Protestant missionaries. The rent would be free so long as the boys – high school students studying in Vigan – conscientiously attended the family worships. Out of his boarders came the first Sabbath keepers. When Hay started colporteur work, his boarders became his first trained colporteurs.

In 1915, Hay conducted two series of public evangelistic meetings held in the open air. The first series of meetings began on March 19, 1915, at San Julian, Vigan. It was held once a week until October of that same year, in which he reported an attendance of 30 to 40 adult persons. In June 1915, Hay started his colporteur training seminars, which lasted several weeks. He taught the art of salesmanship with demonstrations of selling books to the Spanish-designed houses in Vigan. The study of the Bible was also added to the curriculum. His apprentices were the schoolboys residing in their house.

In essence, the year 1915 was seen as a year of continuous progress for seed-sowing. That year, Leon Z. Roda, Hay's Filipino work associate, arrived to assist him in the work in northern Luzon. Hay started another series of meetings on July 3, 1915, at Bukig, Bantay, which was also held once a week. It was then taken over by Roda, and the weekly meetings became nightly meetings.³ On December 25, 1915, 30 people decided to join the Sabbath school organization from the attendees of the meetings in Bukig. This was the second organized Sabbath school in northern Luzon; the first had been on June 19, 1915, with the Hays and their student boarders in Vigan. A few days later, a chapel was built at Bukig, but there was no reported baptism, and it was never organized into a church. The probable reason is the hesitancy of the pioneers to baptize without undergoing a long indoctrination.⁴ It is for this reason that the people were heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism and vices, as explained by Afenir⁵

The work had continued to progress the following year. It was in 1916 when the first baptism in northern Luzon took place. Six Filipinos, Tito P. Atiga, Manuel Oliva, Dominador Javier, Juan O. Afenir, Emilio B. Valera, and Faustina A. Melgar, were baptized. All six became workers of the church; however, Oliva and Javier left the church sometime later. Atiga, Afenir, and Valera became ordained pastors while Faustina became the able assistant of her husband, Valera.⁶ The year 1916 marked the beginning of the Gospel workers going outside Vigan, particularly to the mountainous places in Abra.

Organizational History

In the early part of 1917, the work in northern Luzon was organized into a mission named Northern Luzon Mission with its headquarters at the house of the Hays in Vigan, Ilocos Sur. The provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, and La Union were the initial territories of the newly-established mission. In the following years, the provinces of Pangasinan, Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela, and Cagayan, and some accessible portions of Mountain Province were added. Roy Hay became its first director, Leon Roda the secretary of the home missionary department, and Edith Hay the secretary of the Sabbath school, young people, and education departments.⁷

One of the converts in Vigan named Saturnino Rebolledo, who at the time worked as a cook for an American Methodist missionary, returned home to share the Adventist message with his relatives in Amarao, which is about 80 kilometers south of Vigan. There, Leon Roda conducted evangelistic meetings that resulted in 22 baptisms. These became the charter members of the first Adventist church organized in Amarao, Santa Cruz, Ilocos Sur, on February 3, 1917.

By 1919, Roy Hay received an unexpected call from Victoriano Lapitan. He was from the town of Sison in the province of Pangasinan, which is 200 kilometers south of Vigan. He narrated that about one hundred Protestants were dissatisfied with the United Brethren and Methodist Episcopal Missions due to controversies over Sunday. The conflict was caused by his introduction of Saturday as the biblical day of worship. His knowledge of the Sabbath was based on a previous meeting with Robert Caldwell that led Lapitan to subscribe to the "Signs" magazine. Leon Roda and Juan Afenir were sent to conduct meetings. As a result, a church was organized in the *barrio* of Artacho in Sison in November 1919, which was led by Samuel E. Jackson, the superintendent of the Philippine Union Mission⁸ Through William Ammundsen's leadership, a church school was established in Artacho in 1923. This was the second church school to be established in Northern Luzon Mission. The first was in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, in 1922. Tomas A. Pilar was transferred from the school in Narvacan to pioneer the school in Artacho.

The headquarters of Northern Luzon Mission was relocated many times due to the needs of the field. The mission office was located in Vigan when it was organized in 1917. By mid-1924, the office was transferred to Baguio City to be nearer to the work in the mountainous regions and to enjoy the invigorating cold climate. The mission office was brought back to the lowlands on October 20, 1926, at San Fernando, La Union, to make it more accessible to the lowland provinces of the north and south, where the work had gained more success. The work continued to expand in the east and south provinces of northern Luzon and necessitated the mission office's transfer to Rosales, Pangasinan, in August 1929, where it was located along the major roads going to these territories. Finally, in 1932, the mission headquarters was moved to Artacho, Sison, Pangasinan, to be close to Northern Luzon Academy (formerly Artacho Church School).⁹

In 1939, the Philippine Union Mission and Northern Luzon Mission thought it wise to establish a mission to serve the sub-provinces of Apayao, Benguet, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Lepanto-Amburayan. It was named the Mountain Province Mission, but, for some years, it was operated under the direct supervision of the union with its office in Baguio. The work was led by Victor C. Medina until shortly before World War II.¹⁰

The Adventist message continued to spread in the eastern provinces in the aftermath of World War II. On January 1, 1948, the Northeast Luzon Mission was organized with Jose O. Bautista as president and Aniceto Aqui as the secretary/treasurer. It was established to facilitate the work in the eastern provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela, and Cagayan, including the Batanes group of islands. After ten years, the mission was dissolved, and its territory was returned to Northern Luzon Mission. A secondary school was also established in 1948 to meet the pressing need of education in this part of the mission. It was named Northeast Luzon Junior Academy (now Northeast Luzon Adventist College) and was built on the land donated by a new convert named Mr. Feliciano at Divisoria, Santiago, Isabela. It was then approved to operate a full-fledged secondary education institution with its first graduation in April 1951. It was then relocated to its present site, which is a bigger campus in Mabini, Alicia, Isabela, during the school year of 1960-1961. On March 16, 1959, the former headquarters of Northeast Luzon Mission was converted into a 12-bed hospital at Dubinan, Santiago, Isabela, with Celedonio A. Fernando as its first medical director. The Cagayan Valley Sanitarium and Hospital (now Adventist Hospital Santiago City, Inc.) was then relocated to its present site at Mabini, Santiago, in 1968.¹¹

In 1974, the plan to construct a new mission office was created when Arsenio D. Pimentel was president. A change in leadership in the middle of 1975 altered the plan, and it was proposed that the headquarters be transferred back to San Fernando, La Union. A donated portion of land was big enough to build the office building, a church, a school, and even houses for workers. The plan did not materialize after many thoughtful deliberations. In April 1984, the old mission building was finally demolished, and construction for the new office had started. Because of the generosity of the brethren here and abroad, the construction had progressed, and it was inaugurated the following year. Zineo Manalo became the president of the mission.

As the work progressed in the 21st Century, the mission faced the challenge of closely supervising its growing membership in its wide territory. A solution to this pressing need was to divide the mission in two. By 2010, there was a plan to establish a mission for the eastern provinces of northern Luzon. This was accomplished when, in 2014, the Northeast Luzon Attached Field was established to serve the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino, Isabela, Cagayan, and Batanes. In January 2015, the attached field had attained full mission status under President Levi S. Payoyo.

Having a smaller territory as opposed to its founding years, the mission now has closer supervision of its work. In addition to personal evangelism and the work of literature evangelists, radio and television programs act as means to reach the people.

List of Presidents

Roy E. Hay (1917-1921); William B. Ammundsen (1921-1925); Juan O. Afenir (1925-1930); Edward N. Lugenbeal (1931-1939); Elbridge M. Adams (1939-1941); Victor C. Medina (1941-1947); Antonino Z. Roda (1947-1951); Tomas A. Pilar (1951-1953); Felix B. de la Cruz (1953-1956); Jose O. Bautista (1956-1958); Juan A. Bangloy (1958-1966); Jeremias C. Medina (1966-1973); Arsenio D. Pimentel (1974-1975); Pastor M. Mayor (1975-1979); Eduardo L.

Dingoasen (1980-1981); Zineo L. Manalo (1981-1985); Larry G. Feir (1985-1987); Eliseo N. Bautista (1987-1996); Roger V. Biscaro (1997-2000); Daniel B. Villosio (2001-2005); Danilo R. Asuncion (2006-2010); Elias R. Rafanan (2011-2015); Marvin C. Diaz (2016-).

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NOTES

1. "Northern Luzon Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2019), 349, 351.?
2. Elmer E. Andross, "Northern Luzon Mission: Philippine Islands," *ARH*, March 1919, 14.?
3. Herman L. Reyes, *Breaking Through: Why the Seventh-day Adventist Church Has Grown to be the Largest Protestant Church in the Philippines* (Quezon City, Philippines: Kaunlaran Trading & Printing Co., Inc., 1981), 120.?
4. *Ibid.*, 121.?
5. Juan O. Afenir, "Northern Luzon Mission," *Missions Quarterly*, Second Quarter 1925, 24.?
6. Tomas A. Pilar, "Northern Luzon Mission," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, April 1953, 5; and Reyes, 116, 121, 125-126.?
7. "Northern Luzon Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1918), 162.?
8. Samuel E. Jackson, "From the Philippines," *Field Tidings*, March 1920, 3.?
9. William B. Ammundsen, "Luzon, Philippines," *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, April 1921, 2.; "Change of Address: Northern Luzon Mission," *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, December 1926, 12; "Change of Address for Northern Luzon Mission," *Far Eastern Division Outlook, October*, October 1929, 2; and Lowel J. Domocmat, *Beacon in the North: The Beginning of Adventism in Northern Luzon, Philippines* (Cavite, Philippines: Oikos Biblos Publishing House, 2019), 180-182.?
10. "Mt. Province Mission (Unorganized)," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1940), 138, 139.?
11. Nestor C. Rilloma and Jose F. Sarsoza, Jr., eds., *100 Years Back to the Future: Celebrating God's Goodness* (Manila: Philippine Publishing House, 2005), 81-82, 89.?